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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: J. A. MWANIKI (Kenya)

Chapter ____. SERVICE STATISTICS

1. The Commission considered item 6 of its agenda at its 438th and 439th meetings, on 5 February 1991. It had before it the report of the Secretary-General on the review of the work done by national and international agencies in the field of service statistics (E/CN.3/1991/15) and the report on a model survey of computer services prepared by the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics (E/CN.3/1991/16). The Commission decided to consider each document separately, since document E/CN.3/1991/16 dealt with a specific technical aspect of service statistics, whereas E/CN.3/1991/15 focused on broader topics and issues concerning the development of service statistics.

A. A model survey of computer services

2. The Commission expressed its gratitude for the report of the Voorburg Group on a model survey of computer services. The model was considered excellent guidance for countries contemplating an expansion of the coverage of service activities in that important and evolving field of statistics. Some members indicated their intention to incorporate certain features of the model survey in their data collection systems. It was also recognized that the experience gained in implementation of the model survey of computer services would contribute to the refinement of the provisional Central Product Classification (CPC). The Commission

was also pleased to learn that the preliminary results of pilot studies using the model survey instrument would be presented at the 1991 meeting of the Voorburg Group. To insure adequate circulation of the report of the Voorburg Group, the Commission requested the Statistical Office to arrange for its publication, with a suitable introduction, as part of the regular United Nations methodological series. The publication should be widely distributed.

3. In the course of the discussion of the contribution of the Voorburg Group, some members expressed the view that the Group should prepare model surveys for other complex service activities, such as technical planning and consulting, management consulting, finance and insurance. The view was also expressed that the Voorburg Group should embark on the testing of standards through the pooling of volunteer resources. The Commission recognized the important role of the Voorburg Group in advancing service statistics and decided that the Group should report on a substantive topic at the twenty-seventh session of the Commission.

Action taken by the Commission

4. The Commission:

(a) Requested the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to arrange for the publication and distribution of the Voorburg Group report on a model survey of computer services, with a suitable introduction, as part of its regular methodological reports;

(b) Welcomed the continued contributions of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics to the work of the Statistical Commission and international statistics;

(c) Invited the Voorburg Group to prepare a report on a substantive topic for the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission.

B. Work done by national and international agencies in the field of service statistics

5. The Commission expressed its satisfaction with the comprehensive account of national experiences and the initiatives of international agencies contained in the Secretary-General's report (E/CN.3/1991/15). The Commission also recognized the document's potential usefulness as a reference in connection with facilitating country-to-country co-operation, avoidance of duplicative efforts among international agencies, and furthering collaborative efforts among national agencies in methodological work. In this connection, the Commission stressed that in carrying out studies of national practices the fullest use should be made of the methodological studies already undertaken by other international organizations. That approach would avoid placing the unnecessary burden of duplicative studies on national statistical offices.

6. The Commission expressed its appreciation of the ongoing work of ECE, UNCTAD, IMF, GATT, OECD and EUROSTAT. The Commission was informed that a joint EUROSTAT/ECE Working Group would meet with non-Community members in March 1991 to discuss the EUROSTAT manual on service statistics and the model survey of computer services. The Commission also welcomed the initiatives of ECE in respect of transition countries.

7. In its discussion of the collaboration between national and international agencies in the development of service statistics, the Commission endorsed the role of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat as the continuing secretariat of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics. In that regard, the Commission stressed the need for the Statistical Office and interested international agencies to create new capacities to advance work and knowledge in service statistics. Accordingly, the Commission recommended that the Statistical Office effect a wider dissemination of technical materials, including reports prepared by the Voorburg Group, and introduce a mechanism for processing feedbacks from national statistical authorities.

8. The Commission stressed the importance of involving the developing countries in work on the development of service statistics. It was clearly evident that statisticians in developing countries were experiencing a combination of methodological, data collection and organizational problems in the field of service statistics. The Commission was pleased to note that it was possible to arrange for selected developing countries to participate in the annual meetings of the Voorburg Group. However, it was noted that the number of developing countries currently participating in the Voorburg Group was very small and not broadly representative. The Commission reiterated that, in spite of its valuable contribution, the Voorburg Group could not replace the traditional methods of developing international statistical methodology (regional meetings, consultant studies, expert group meetings). The view was expressed that, in addition to access to methodology, there might be need for pilot studies to determine the requirements for advancing service statistics in the developing countries.

9. The Commission expressed its support for the inclusion of work covering methodology, technical co-operation and co-ordination in the 1992-1993 work programme of the Statistical Office. The priorities and the order of activities in methodological work involving price and quantity indexes were considered acceptable. With regard to technical co-operation, the Commission emphasized the need for advisory services and regional seminars. The Commission stressed the importance of promoting co-ordination among interested international agencies and emphasized that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat should co-operate closely with the Voorburg Group in order to establish a standard format for the presentation of the draft guidelines on price and volume measures. It was feared that data compilation at that early stage in the development of service statistics might lead to the emergence of rigid structures in definitions and classifications.

Action taken by the Commission

10. The Commission:

(a) Supported the proposed activities in service statistics for the 1992-1993 biennium in respect of methodology, technical co-operation, and the promotion of co-ordination. More specifically, the Commission recommended the following priorities in methodology: (i) Further review of national practices in price and volume measures; (ii) Establishment of a standard format for the presentation of the draft guidelines; (iii) Use of a standard format to obtain comments and suggestions from countries on the proposed recommendations; and (iv) Finalization of countries' contributions to recommendations on the methodology of price and volume measures;

(b) Endorsed the function of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat as the continuing secretariat to the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics;

(c) Emphasized the need for the use of traditional processes for developing international recommendations in the field of service statistics, drawing on experience and developments in all regions of the world;

(d) Emphasized the need for co-ordination among international agencies interested in the development of all aspects of service statistics;

(e) Requested the Statistical Office to arrange for the dissemination of technical materials in order to ensure the visibility of substantive work in service statistics;

(f) Stressed the need for enhancing technical co-operation related to service statistics through advisory services and regional seminars.